



Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

A Complete Catechesis for Christian Living

Doctrinal Catechesis Session
Mary Birmingham

ECUMENISM



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Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Option 1: Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2: Use the prayer which is below.

Prayer of Pope Clement XI

Lord, I believe in you: increase my faith.

I trust in you: strengthen my trust.

I love you: let me love you more and more.

I am sorry for my sins: deepen my sorrow.

I worship you as my first beginning.

I long for you as my last end.

I praise you as my constant helper.

And I call you as my loving protector.

I want to do what you ask of me:

In the way you ask, for as long as you ask, because you ask it.

Let me love you Lord as my God.

And see myself as I really am: a pilgrim in this world.

A Christian called to respect and love all those lives I touch.



Note to the Catechist

There may be more material than you can use in a one-hour session.
Select and arrange accordingly. Use questions and material that is best
suited for your particular group.



Read the connecting statement

to draw the line between this week's
liturgy and this chosen doctrinal theme.

This connecting statement is found in the *Breaking
Open the Word* worksheet for this week.

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Version 2.0 reflects all recent revisions in
the Roman Missal.

NIHIL OBSTAT
Rev. Steven Olds
Censor Liborum

IMPRIMATUR
† Most Rev. John Noonan
Bishop of Orlando

June 27, 2011

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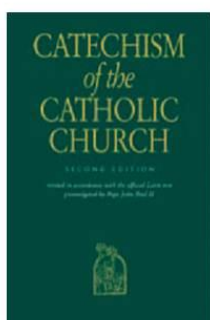
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Sharing Human Experience

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions. Catechist invites participants to break into small groups (three or four). Remind participants to make time for all in the group to respond to the questions.

- ▶ Have you ever had the experience of a Christian trying to convince you that their church was the only authentic church there is?
- ▶ How did it make you feel?



Sharing Catholic Doctrine

Drawn from the Catechism of the Catholic Church

Refer to articles 816; 820-822

- ▶ The Catholic Catechism defines Ecumenism as the effort to restore unity among all Christians. It further asserts that unity is a gift given to us by Jesus himself. It is called forth by the Holy Spirit (glossary, p. 876).
- ▶ The word *ecumenism* refers to the effort among Christians to unite Christian churches. Christ prayed that all would all be one. He prayed for the unity of his followers. The separation of Christian churches goes against the will of Jesus and is a scandal to the world.
- ▶ The purpose of the ecumenical movement is to bring all Christians together in mutual charity, understanding and for a common mission, to spread the gospel to all corners of the earth.
- ▶ Throughout Christian history, divisions and rifts between communities existed which were condemned by Church leaders. However, those divisions reached epic proportions in later centuries as serious disagreements ruptured large communities all at once. Whole communities separated from full communion with the Catholic Church.
- ▶ The Catholic Church is quick to point out that blame could be leveled against people on both sides of the arguments.

- ▶ Faithful Christian descendants of these communities can hardly be blamed for the sin (the dissension, disunity, and separation) of their ancestors.
- ▶ The Catholic Church regards all separated brothers and sisters with utmost respect and affection.
- ▶ It is important to express a truth about which many Catholics are unaware, that baptized Christians who are faithful to Christ are already in communion with the Catholic Church, albeit an imperfect union (Decree on Ecumenism, #3).
- ▶ Yes, there are obstacles, and we must not dismiss those obstacles. They are real. There are differences of beliefs, of doctrine, ritual practices, discipline, and Church structure.
- ▶ The ecumenical movement is working to remove as many obstacles as possible. We are all to join in that effort. Ecumenism was a great concern of Pope John Paul II.
- ▶ Regardless of the obstacles, we must never lose sight of the truth that all who are baptized into Christ Jesus are members of his body and thus we can rightly call members of separated communities brothers and sisters in Christ.
- ▶ The Catholic Church affirms the gifts of the Spirit that exist outside the boundaries of the Catholic Church such as Scripture, living a life of grace, the virtues of faith, hope and love, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Such gifts and charisms come from Christ himself in order to build up his body.
- ▶ Other ecclesial churches and communities also engage in worship and ritual action that offers them God's grace and assists in the work of redemption and salvation.
- ▶ It is therefore important to affirm that our separated brothers and sisters enjoy a significant role in the economy of salvation.
- ▶ Nevertheless, Catholic teaching still asserts that Catholicism contains the fullest means and access to salvation because of the entirety of Christ's mission that exists within it and that was entrusted to Peter and the Apostles and handed down in an unbroken line for the purpose of building up the Church.
- ▶ That fullness is expressed through the Church's liturgy, ritual and sacraments, especially the Eucharist as well as through its devotions, sacramentals, and ministries.





Sharing Faith

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions.

- ▶ Why is it important to reach out in love to people from other faith traditions?
- ▶ What is the good news in what we just heard about the Catholic response to ecumenism?
- ▶ What are the implications for your life as a Christian? What should you do? What should you never do?

Catechist continues:

- ▶ The ecumenical movement suggests initiatives to foster the unity that Christ demands of us.
- ▶ First, we are to avoid making unfair judgments and never use derogatory expressions or actions that would make dialogue and mutual cooperation untenable.
- ▶ Gatherings for the purpose of fostering Christian unity should be a priority. People from the various ecclesial traditions should engage in healthy dialogue.
- ▶ Each ecclesial communion and confession should gather together to share the primary teachings of their respective traditions and their distinct and unique charisms.
- ▶ It is only through such dialogue that mutual respect and understanding has a chance to grow (Decree on Ecumenism, #4).

Catechist now presents initiatives that foster Christian unity:

Conversion

- ▶ Those committed to the work of ecumenism should first be open to deep conversion of heart.
- ▶ We must pray for the humility to offer our lives in the service of others.
- ▶ True humility opens us to receive and respect the gift and wisdom all parties bring to the dialogue.

Forgiveness

- ▶ We must also pray for forgiveness for the sins against unity we have made and continue to make.
- ▶ We sin against unity when we do not live lives worthy of the gospel.
- ▶ Without conversion of mind, heart, and soul, without common and private prayer, there is no true ecumenism.

Prayer

- ▶ The Church tells us that it is laudable for Catholics to gather with separated Christians to pray for unity.

- ▶ Such prayer is itself actualization of the prayer for unity; it is the realization of the unity for which we pray.
- ▶ When gathering for prayer, it is important to stress what we hold in common, Scriptures, praise and worship of God, preaching, music, spreading the gospel, care for the poor.
- ▶ It is important that when crafting prayer for common gatherings we avoid arrogant declarations that one's particular ecclesial tradition is the only path to God and therefore no one else is saved.

Study

- ▶ We are exhorted to study the various Christian Church traditions.
- ▶ How will we ever know what unites us if we do not also study how we are different?
- ▶ Catholics are encouraged to study the history, the liturgies, the doctrines, and the spirituality of our separated brothers and sisters in order to appreciate our common, though diverse bond (#9).

Optional exercise

If time allows and if there are persons present from other ecclesial traditions, invite them to share a few treasures of their particular church tradition:

- ✓ What makes them different?
- ✓ In what way do their liturgies differ?
- ✓ What do they believe about baptism?
- ✓ How are they baptized?
- ✓ What do they believe about salvation?

Catechist invites such persons before the session begins so they have time to prepare their thoughts.

Catechist continues:

- ▶ What Catholics must never do in the interest of ecumenism is water down Catholic teaching. Catholic teaching in its fullness is to be shared “profoundly and precisely,” but in a manner that is understandable to all parties involved.
- ▶ Those who present Catholic teaching must be careful to present it with love and great humility. Triumphalism is to be avoided. Never are we to suggest by our words, implications, or actions that “we have the whole truth and you have nothing!” Such an attitude is hardly in the spirit of ecumenism.
- ▶ Persons who are serious about fostering ecumenism are to celebrate what they do hold in common: establishing the reign of God on earth, spreading the gospel of Christ, reaching out to the poor and disenfranchised, sharing a common hope.

Exercise

Catechist invites participants to divide into groups of four. Catechist provides Bibles to each group if possible. Catechists allow ten to fifteen minutes for this exercise. Invite each group to create an ecumenical gathering, using these or similar words:

Imagine you are inviting people to your home who are from different Christian church communities (such as Methodists, Lutherans, Episcopalians, and Evangelicals). You are gathering just to share a common faith in Jesus. You are the leaders of the group. Using the principles just discussed, create an evening that will accomplish the goals of ecumenism as set forth in the Church's document on ecumenism that we just shared.

- ✓ Make a step-by-step outline of how the evening will flow.
- ✓ Choose a Scripture that might be meaningful to all in attendance.
- ✓ Create some dialogue questions.
- ✓ Choose what common prayers you will use.

Appoint a spokesperson for your group and read your proposal to the wider group.

Implications for discipleship

- ▶ We are all called to reach out to our separated brothers and sisters in order to foster unity.
- ▶ The call to live a holy life is all the greater because our infidelity to God promotes further disunity.
- ▶ We should never be afraid to share our Catholic faith with others when called upon to do so.
- ▶ We are never to water down our faith in the interest of ecumenism.
- ▶ We are called to participate in events sponsored by local churches to foster ecumenism. When there is a service for Christian Unity, we should make it a high priority to attend.
- ▶ Every January Catholics gather with other Christian denominations for prayer in the spirit of Christian Unity.
- ▶ Christian unity is the desire of Jesus' heart.



Mystagogy & your decision for change

Catechist invites participants to reflect on the way in which the Church's teaching on ecumenism has anything to do with either everyday lives. Catechist witnesses to a story in his or her life or invites another parishioner to witness. Catechist then invites participants to witness to one another, using the reflection questions given below. See appendix #1 for an example.

- ▶ How does the Church's teaching on ecumenism impact your own life?
- ▶ Why should you care about ecumenism—how could it ever have an impact on you?
- ▶ How does it relate to an experience in your life?

Liturgy, Scripture, and doctrine challenge us to transform our lives so that we can go out and help transform the world.

Catechist informs the group of any parish activity and makes arrangements of group participation. What is taking place in the parish community to foster ecumenism?

When is the next local gathering for Christian unity? Are you willing to commit to participating in such an event? If not, why not? Are there any established ecumenical projects in which God is calling you to participate?

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following challenge by sharing with one other person.

- ▶ In what way does this teaching on ecumenism challenge you and the Christian community?
- ▶ In what way does today's session challenge you to change?
- ▶ Is there a behavior or attitude in need of transformation?
- ▶ What are you willing to commit to do in response to what you learned about ecumenism?

Journal

Questions for your journal throughout the week: What can you do at your workplace, in your everyday life to foster a spirit of ecumenism? What is God calling you to do in response to this very holy work he has called us to do?



Closing Prayer

Option 1: If this is a catechumenal session, end the session with Intercessions, Doxology (“Glory be to the Father...”), a minor rite—a blessing or minor exorcism, RCIA # 90-97.

Option 2: One or several of the OPENING PRAYERS, #13. For the Unity of Christians, Sacramentary. Lord’s Prayer, Intercessions. Or use the litany below.

Litany of Christian Unity

L.: In Christ, the world is reconciled to God who entrusts to us the message of reconciliation. As the ambassadors of Christ’s reconciling work, we make our petitions to God:

L.: When we pray together from our diverse traditions,

A.: Holy One who makes us one, make our unity visible and bring healing to the world.

L.: When we read the Bible together in our diversity of language and context,

A.: Revealing One who makes us one, make our unity visible and bring healing to the world.

L.: When we establish relations of friendships among Jews, Christians, and Muslims, when we tear down the wall of indifference and hatred,

A.: Merciful One who makes us one, make our unity visible and bring healing to the world.

L.: When we work for justice and solidarity, when we move from fear to confidence,

A.: Strengthening One who makes us one, make our unity visible and bring healing to the world.

L.: Wherever there is suffering through war and violence, injustice and inequality, disease and prejudice, poverty and hopelessness, drawing us near to the cross of Christ and to each other,

A.: Wounded One who makes us one, make our unity visible and bring healing to the world.

L.: With Christians of the Holy Land, we, too, are witnesses to the birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem, his ministry in Galilee, his death and resurrection, and the descent of the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem. When we yearn for peace and justice for all in the sure and certain hope of your coming Kingdom,

A.: Triune One who makes us one, make our unity visible and bring healing to the world.

From the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity

Appendix

I recently attended a family gathering. A relative by marriage was sharing her new-found evangelical faith with me. Her faith was alive, and she wanted to share it with me because she knew I had an active faith life. We approached each other with a great deal of respect and love as we both had high regard for one another in the first place.

As we began to share, it became acutely apparent that there was much that divided us. We were on different pages when it came to so much: salvation and who is saved and who is not; to whom God's mercy extends and to whom it does not; how we approach the sacred Scriptures and how we do not. She longed to change my mind and I hers.

I could feel her angst as I shared my very passionate beliefs about those issues, and I am sure she felt mine. Our approaches and disagreements were starkly obvious. However, what was marvelous in the exchange is that when we parted ways we were both able to express a common bond, a common faith, and a common love for Jesus Christ. We were able to say that his mercy surpasses all our understanding. On the other issues, we will just have to agree to disagree and let Jesus work it out when we reach our final destination.

If all religious disagreements could be worked out in such a loving and respectful manner, had they been similarly worked out before they fractured the Church, there never would have been a Protestant Reformation.

Handout on Ecumenism

- ▶ The Catholic Catechism defines Ecumenism as the effort to restore unity among all Christians. It further asserts that unity is a gift given to us by Jesus himself. It is called forth by the Holy Spirit (glossary, p. 876).
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